19 Years

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19 Years

by NerosDad

Summary

Crookshanks has passed and Harry helps Hermione deal with her loss

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Hermione apparated home from her workplace into her secluded garden and unlocked her back door. The little house she had inherited from her paternal grandmother was empty and dark. The motion activated light in the hallway socket did not illuminate the doorway. No plaintive yowl of starvation greeted her on arrival.

She stepped in and closed the door, flicking the lights on with her hand, she mostly lived muggle at the cottage. Stepping through the kitchen, she hung her coat in the cupboard and turned to make herself a drink. There was no water bowl at the side of the units, no food tray on a mat. The cat-flap was locked and stood silent. She stopped and sighed, the emptiness, the silence was oppressive. She swallowed, trying to keep herself balanced.

With another long sigh Hermione filled the kettle and set it to boil. Without Crookshanks, the house felt empty, cold and lonely. It had been three days since she had found him, curled up in his basket. He had not woken with his customary chirrup, he had not complained loudly that his bowl of biscuits was anything but completely full. He had been so still, so quiet.

At some point in the night he had crossed over, slipped away, yet another death of someone close. For reasons Hermione could not explain, she was struggling to come to terms with his passing. Crooks had been with her for nineteen years, except for the year on the run, where he had terrorized the rodent population of Ottery St. Catchpole. His loud and frequent complaints had brought her to tears when they were reunited after her return from Australia.

He was old when she found him in the shop in Diagon Alley, so his life had been long and latterly pampered. It did nothing to diminish the hole she felt in her heart for her familiar. She poured the water over her tea bag in the mug, ‘World’s best cat mum’ it said. She smiled ruefully at the image on the side, a fat ginger cat glowering back. Harry had bought the mug back from one of his field trips to Europe as a senior Auror.

She stirred her tea bag around the mug on auto pilot, before wringing it out against the side of the mug, and dropping it into the bin under the sink. Milk from the fridge, just a splash, and she headed into the lounge of the cottage, the evening sun laying patterns across the rug through the venetian blinds. The sun’s rays highlighted the stray strands of orange cat fur stuck to the slats, that defied magic, vacuum cleaners and elbow grease to remove.

She sat in her favourite chair, the cushion at her side, pointedly empty. No paw prodded her leg for attention, no headbutts to remind her who was important. She sipped her tea and stared out of the window. Hermione did not know how long she sat, but her mug was empty and the light was fading outside when she heard the knock. She put the empty mug down on a side table, next to one of her hair scrunchies, one that Crookshanks delighted in stealing. Opening the front door, she was met with a sight she needed, but didn’t realise.

“Harry. I thought you were in Morrocco?” she asked.

“I was. But I am here now. Are you going to let me in?” he smiled a thin lipped smile. Hermione stepped back from the door, he entered the house and took her in his arms, pulling her head to his shoulder. “I heard that Crooks had passed on, I figured you would need a shoulder to lean on.” He murmured into her hair.

“I am OK, I think. He went in his sleep, it was his time. He had a good life.” Her voice cracked at the last statement, “Why does it hurt, Harry? I am no stranger to death. I have seen enough of it, horrible and violent. Why does seeing my little man slip away hurt so much?”

“Because you cared. Because you loved him, he was your familiar, linked to your magic, to your very soul. It will settle, but you will always have a little Crookshanks sized pawprint on your heart.”

“Did Hedwig’s death hurt you like this.” He nodded against her head. She gasped, “no one even noticed, none of us said a thing.” She sniffed. “I am so sorry Harry, for all the times you were hurting and we did nothing.”

“It’s all good, Hermione. It’s all ancient history now. I am determined to look forward. We don’t live in the past, we live in the now. Right now, you are hurting, and I want to help you deal with your pain.”

“Thanks,” she mumbled, “Do you want a cuppa?” she lifted her head and Harry wiped the tears from her cheeks with a handkerchief he had conjured from somewhere. She took it from him and blew her nose noisily.

“Have you buried him?” he asked.

Hermione shook her head slightly, “Stasis charm, in the old coalhouse. I..”

“Let’s make him a little grave, set him down near that tree he liked. His body will feed the tree, it will grow, completing the circle.”

Hermione nodded, “I like that. The circle of life. I can conjure him a little headstone, a marker, something for me to remember him by.”

They went outside and Hermione carried the basket that held Crookshanks still form down the garden, to where Harry had swiftly created a small excavation, tucked in amongst the roots of the Maple tree that grew in the sunny corner of her garden. Kneeling she laid his blanket into the hole and lifted his small body down into the ground, wrapping him carefully before standing and with Harry’s help, refilling the grave with the soil.

“Goodnight little man, she whispered, Harry stepped up behind her and wrapped his arms around her. They stood silent for a while as she shed a few more tears over his last resting place. Eventually they walked back up the garden, Harry carried the empty basket back to the outhouse. He placed it carefully on the shelf, closing the door, and following Hermione inside. She sat at the kitchen table, looking out through the large glass doors over the garden as the sun slowly dipped below the distant hills, bathing the sky in reds and pinks as it set.

Harry took the chair next to her, he reached over and squeezed her hand, a simple look saying what he felt, what needed to be said between them. “Thanks for coming Harry. I was putting it off, I suppose burying him is the final admission that he has gone.”

“It’s nothing Hermione, I owe you plenty.”

“Will you get into trouble, with work?”

“No. I have finished with being an Auror. I have to go into the bullpen and drop off my badge, and after that I am done.”

“I didn’t know you were leaving. I thought you always wanted to be an Auror?”

“I have had enough fighting for any two lifetimes Hermione. I want to do something to help people have better lives, and I need a rest, if I am honest.”

She nodded, mulling over the change in her mind. “I think you have done enough, was it really ever your idea to become an Auror? Or was it yet another thing everyone expected?”

Harry snorted in amusement. “Ron, Molly, Ginny, Shack, they all just kept talking as if it was a done deal. I just didn’t have the fight left in me to say no. Since the Weasleys don’t speak to either of us anymore, and Shack isn’t standing next time around, I figure, it’s time for me to do what I want, for a change.”

“Do you know what you want?”

“I haven’t got a clue. Do you?” he replied.

She shook her head. “No, I have been in a holding pattern for a few years. I think I might take a break and go see my folks again. Fancy a trip to Oz?”

“Can do. Lay on a beach for a bit. Being out of reach, might be a good idea?” He nodded to the outside, “Look.”

In the twilight an owl flared its wings and landed on one of the fence posts at the bottom of the garden, its pale visage illuminated by the light from the kitchen door light. It hooted softly into the dusk.

“A barn owl.” Hermione remarked. “A male.”

“You can tell from here?”

“Females make the “Twit’ sound, males call “who?” she grinned, “it always made me smile.”

Harry turned to look at the owl sitting on the post, “Snowy owls didn’t hoot as such, and Hedwig was such a diva.” He smiled. Another owl flew over the tops of the trees in the orchard behind Hermione’s house. A white owl, sparkling in the low light. It landed on a post farther along the fence.

“Harry. Is that….?” As she spoke a cat jumped up onto the fence from the other side and sat on the post nearest the white owl. It’s amber eyes shone in the low light and it’s thick orange fur rippled in the slight breeze. “Crooks…….” Hermione gasped out the word and the owl and the kneazle faded from view as the moon appeared in the darkening sky.

“And the cow jumped over the moon…..” Harry murmured. He reached out and wrapped Hermione in a soft embrace. “Australia?” she nodded, a solitary tear tracked down her cheek.

“Let’s pack and leave tomorrow. There is nothing in England for me anymore. Nothing except you.”

She looked at him, for a long moment. “Yes. I agree. We can take some time. It will be nice to see my mum and dad again, and they love you. Prepare to be pestered.”

“Pestered?”

“My mum thinks you are the one I should have dated, not Ron.”

Harry looked at her for a long moment. He agreed with her mum, but had never told Hermione. This was definitely not the right time to ask her out, perhaps in a few days, on a nice beach. He would pack a ring before they left, he was pretty sure Hermione would agree to start dating, and he couldn’t see any way he would ever end it if it started. It would lead to a church and family, and that’s what he wanted most of all. Family.

End Notes

I wrote this the day after I had to take Nero on a one way trip to the vet as his time had come.

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